

fact sheet

Guidelines for the Control of a Suspected or Confirmed Outbreak of Viral Gastroenteritis in a Nursing Home

These guidelines have been developed to help stop the spread of viral gastroenteritis in nursing homes. These viruses are **highly contagious and very hardy**, so stringent adherence is necessary. Preventive measures should be continued for at least 3 days after the outbreak appears over, since infected persons continue to shed the virus after they have recovered.

1. Isolate ill residents from others by confining them to their rooms (until 3 days after their last symptoms). Group ill people together if possible. Discontinue activities where ill and well residents would be together. Group activities should be kept to a minimum or postponed until the outbreak is over.
2. Ideally, keep all residents in their rooms and serve meals in rooms.
3. Ill staff should remain out of work for 3 days following *cessation* of diarrhea and/or vomiting.
4. Minimize the flow of staff between sick and well residents. Staff should be assigned to work with either well residents or sick residents, but should not care for both groups. Staff who go back and forth between ill and well residents, play an important role in transmitting the virus from resident to resident.
5. Staff should wash their hands when entering and leaving *every* resident room.
6. Staff should wear gloves when caring for ill residents or when touching potentially contaminated surfaces. Gloves should be discarded and hands washed immediately after completing patient care.
7. Masks should be worn when caring for residents who are vomiting.
8. Use a disinfectant to frequently clean surfaces such as handrails, doorknobs, physical/occupational therapy equipment, etc. (Think of items that are touched regularly and make sure that they are cleaned frequently). The recommended disinfectant is *freshly made* bleach solution (e.g. 1 cup bleach to 9 cups water). For surfaces that could corrode or be damaged by bleach, concentrated phenol solutions may be used (e.g., Amphyl, Mikro-Bac II). These should be mixed at twice the manufacturers' recommended concentration to kill norovirus. **These chemicals can be dangerous. Follow all safety instructions.** Other effective cleaners include parachlorometaxylenol (e.g., EcoTru), or peroxomonosulphate (e.g., Virkon). These should be mixed at the manufacturers'

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recommended concentrations. Commonly used quarternary ammonium disinfectants do not appear to be effective against norovirus.

9. Contaminated carpets should be cleaned with detergent and hot water, then disinfected with hypochlorite (if bleach-resistant) or steam cleaned. Housekeeping staff should wear gloves and masks when cleaning contaminated or potentially contaminated surfaces or laundry. Contaminated linen and bed curtains should be carefully placed into laundry bags (to prevent generating aerosols) and washed separately in hot water for a complete wash cycle – ideally as a half load for best dilution.
10. It may be prudent to discontinue visitation to the nursing home until the outbreak is over. If visitation is allowed, visitors should go directly to the person they are visiting and not spend time with anyone else. They should wash their hands upon entering and leaving the room. They should not visit if they are sick.

Please contact your LOCAL HEALTH DEPARTMENT for assistance as soon as an outbreak is suspected. The LOCAL HEALTH DEPARTMENT can also provide FREE LABORATORY TESTING of residents and staff during an outbreak.